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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001897

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: SPASM OF VIOLENCE IN NORTH AND EAST

REF: COLOMBO 1856

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. 1.4 (b,d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary. On the eve of the LTTE's emotional Hero's Day ceremonies November 26-27, violent incidents, including LTTE killings of an army soldier and informants in the east, grenade attacks on the LTTE's political offices in Batticaloa, and an LTTE-enforced strike in Jaffna, have created a tense atmosphere in the north and east. The LTTE is taking advantage of its strength in Jaffna to put on a tougher show of Tiger power than usual this year, in the run-up to the annual celebration of Hero's Day. Meanwhile, LTTE posturing in Batticaloa seems to be failing, as pro-Karuna support weakens the LTTE's base. End Summary.

Jaffna Hartal Leading Up to Hero's Day

[12.](#) (C) On November 19, according to media and other sources, two people were killed and one person was injured in a pistol attack in Velvitithurai, Jaffna District. (Velvettithurai is Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's hometown.) The victims had been playing soccer on the grounds where one of Jaffna's larger Hero's Day (the emotional November 26-27 LTTE commemoration of its "martyrs" who have died for the cause,) ceremonies is scheduled to take place. In response to the incident, the LTTE called a hartal, or general strike, on the Jaffna Peninsula on November 20, closing shops and halting public transit. The motive for the attack and the identities of the gunmen are unknown, but Jaffna sources speculated that the perpetrators were anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) cadres--possibly with backing from the Sri Lanka Army (SLA). [13.](#) Paramaeswaran, a journalist in Jaffna, told poloff that he believed the SLA was using the EPDP to upset harmony in Jaffna.

[13.](#) (U) An SLA press release disputed this version of events and asserted that the LTTE fired on the crowd to harm EPDP supporters watching the soccer match. The SLA statement also noted that the LTTE was trying to provoke the SLA and disrupt normalcy in Jaffna. According to other media reports, the injured man, who is an EPDP activist, was originally taken to Velvettithurai Hospital, but the SLA later moved him to the Palaly Military Hospital for his protection. The pro-LTTE website TamilNet posted LTTE Jaffna Political Leader C. Ilamparithi's comments that the SLA should take responsibility for the killings because "this dastardly crime" took place in an area near SLA sentries and "mini-camps," and continued, "...the current peace environ is threatened by such killings."

Killings of SLA Informants Continue in East

[14.](#) (C) Deputy Inspector of Police for the Eastern Province Neville Wijesinghe told poloff November 22 that the LTTE is continuing to target intelligence operatives, as evidenced by killings in the east in the past week. On November 18, near Batticaloa District, an SLA soldier attached to military intelligence was killed while riding his motorcycle, along with his passenger, a Tamil SLA informant. On November 20, according to Wijesinghe, the LTTE killed a former LTTE cadre-turned SLA informant in Trincomalee District.

Batticaloa Still Disputed

[15.](#) (C) An LTTE political worker was killed in Valaichenai, north of Batticaloa on November 17. Pro-LTTE website TamilNet charged that paramilitary operatives working with the SLA were responsible. In the early hours of November 21, LTTE political offices that were recently reopened in Batticaloa were attacked. Wijesinghe told poloff that supporters of breakaway eastern LTTE leader Karuna were responsible for the attacks. Police in Batticaloa conducted

"cordon and search" operations November 22, after an SLA tip that there were weapons in the town. Wijesinghe reported that pro-Karuna cadre do not want the LTTE to celebrate Hero's Day in Karuna-sympathetic Batticaloa, but will not be able to do much more themselves to prevent LTTE activity. (Note: He did not think the LTTE killings of an SLA soldier and informants were related to Hero's Day celebrations and did not foresee further problems in Batticaloa.) Other sources told poloff that decorations and preparation for Hero's Day in Batticaloa were significantly more understated than in previous years.

Trinco Prepares for Hero's Day

16. (C) In Trincomalee, meanwhile, sources told poloff that Hero's Day preparations were much more intense than in previous years. Busloads of Tamils from around Trincomalee District are expected to arrive there to take part in the LTTE ceremonies. Major General Asoka Jayawardhana, Governor of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, told poloff November 22 that a scheduled November 26-17 conference of provincial governors would "not interfere" with the LTTE commemorations, nor would the Hero's Day activities interfere with the conference. He noted that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) would be present at the conference, to be held at a hotel near Trincomalee Town. Other sources told poloff that the LTTE had pressured the hotel manager to cancel the event, but was unsuccessful. Wijesinghe noted that he expects the major LTTE ceremonies to be in LTTE-controlled Sampur, across the harbor from Trincomalee town, and does not expect the LTTE's activities to disturb the governors' conference. Wijesinghe noted that the police and the SLMM will increase monitoring in Trincomalee, and that checkpoints on the main road to Trincomalee will be increased.

Comment

17. (C) Some interlocutors in the government and diplomatic community had hoped that the tough message the Tiger delegation heard during its recent European trip would be reflected in Prabhakaran's annual Hero's Day policy speech. If recent events in Jaffna and the east are any indication, it seems unlikely that the LTTE leader will adopt the more conciliatory tone hoped for. While the LTTE typically uses the run-up to Hero's Day to reinforce public support, this year's violence--following so closely on Norwegian Foreign Minister Petersen's meeting with Prabhakaran (Reftel)--flies in the face of international calls for LTTE flexibility and renunciation of violence. While the truth about the November 19 killings in Jaffna is still hazy, Tiger allegations of Army involvement are clearly meant to discredit the military and the Government in the Tiger heartland. The LTTE is taking advantage of its strength in Jaffna to put on a tougher show of Tiger power than usual this year. In more demographically diverse Trincomalee, meanwhile, LTTE efforts to mobilize a public show of support could provoke even greater friction between Muslims, Sinhalese and Tamils. LTTE posturing in Batticaloa, on the other hand, seems to be failing, as pro-Karuna support weakens the LTTE's base there.

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